

Easter Facts and Fancies.



EASTER is celebrated all over the world, though not by all the world. About one-third of the people of the civilized world will observe the day as a commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth—which is to say that about one-third of the civilized world is Christian. Roughly speaking, there are about 565,000,000 Christians and about 1,082,000,000 non-Christians. The Christians are thus classified: Roman Catholics, 272,800,000; Eastern churches, 120,000,000; Protestant churches, 171,650,000. The non-Christians are thus classified: Jews, 12,205,000; Mohammedans, 221,825,000; Buddhists, 138,031,000; Hindus, 210,540,000; Confucianists and Taoists, 300,830,000; Shintoists, 25,000,000; Animists, 158,270,000; unclassified, 15,280,000.

The Christians may be geographically classified thus:

Europe—Roman Catholic, 183,700,000; Eastern churches, 98,000,000; Protestant churches, 93,000,000.

Asia—Roman Catholic, 5,500,000; Eastern churches, 17,200,000; Protestant churches, 6,000,000.

Africa—Roman Catholic, 2,500,000; Eastern churches, 3,800,000; Protestant churches, 2,750,000.

North America—Roman Catholic, 36,700,000; Eastern churches, 1,000,000; Protestant churches, 65,000,000.

South America—Roman Catholic, 36,200,000; Protestant churches, 400,000.

Oceania—Roman Catholic, 8,200,000; Protestant churches, 4,600,000.

The Jews are thus distributed: Europe, 9,250,000; Asia, 500,000; Africa, 400,000; North America, 2,000,000; South America, 35,000; Oceania, 25,000.

Another geographical classification is this:

Europe—Christians, 374,700,000; other faiths, 14,050,000; total, 388,750,000.

Asia—Christians, 28,700,000; other faiths, 863,500,000; total, 892,200,000.

Africa—Christians, 9,050,000; other faiths, 140,871,000; total, 150,000,000.

North America—Christians, 102,700,000; other faiths, 10,285,000; total, 112,985,000.

South America—Christians, 36,600,000; other faiths, 1,400,000; total, 38,000,000.

Oceania—Christians, 12,700,000; other faiths, 42,929,000; total, 55,629,000.

It may safely be said that the allied Christian nations will celebrate Easter this year with unusual solemnity. The life immortal is a comforting belief just now, when the world has been brought face to face with death by the great war as never before. Probably also it will be celebrated as usual in Germany, for the Germans make much ado over Easter.

Easter in Russia.

Even in distracted Russia Easter will be observed, for the Greek Catholic church makes much of the celebration and Easter observance is a part of the national life. Certainly Easter of 1918 was observed as usual in many parts of Russia, although the anarchist disorders were well under way. Here is a bit of description from a letter written from Kiev in 1918:

"Easter is the greatest festival of all the year; infinitely more so than Christmas. At 12 o'clock we drove out to the 'Lavra,' the oldest monastery and the richest in all Russia. Can you imagine a huge courtyard surrounded by a 40-foot wall and immense covered gateway, groups of large white buildings all ablaze with light, with the snow for a background; the center building the church, doors open, the inside lighted by a thousand candles, and the chanting of 1,500 priests. In the open courtyard were thousands of soldiers with uncovered heads, each bearing a lighted candle. To the right stands the bell tower, a wonderful structure over 200 feet high. At the stroke of 12 the most wonderful bells in Russia peal forth as you have never heard bells in America. Thousands of voices cry 'Christ is risen,' and the priests come forth and march around the building."

In the days before the great war no festivals in Europe attracted so many foreigners as the celebration in Rome of the holy week. It was not unusual for more than 10,000 visitors to be present, a large proportion of them being English and Americans—and also Protestants. Doubtless there will be many visitors this Easter season. Easter Sunday is the culmination of the ceremonies. The pope himself officiates at high mass in St. Peter's with the most gorgeous ritual. It is after he extends his blessing that the papers containing prayers are thrown down from his balcony to be scrambled for by the congregation.

Jerusalem, the Holy City.

The celebration of this Easter in Jerusalem will probably be noteworthy. It is the first Easter in seven consecutive centuries which finds the holy city permanently freed from the misrule of the Moslem. Mohammedan misrule and oppression had their beginning 13 centuries ago, but the Crusaders held possession of the city twice—once under Godfrey of Bouillon (1099-1187) and again under Frederick II (1229-1244). The British, under General Allenby, were in possession at Easter of 1918, but fighting was going on in all the surrounding region and the fate of the city was still in the balance.

In normal times business in Jerusalem comes to a stop at the Easter season and religious ceremonial is the dominating interest. It is a sort of fourfold celebration. The Mohammedans contribute by holding a pilgrimage to the tomb of Moses. The Jews celebrate the passover.

Both the Greek Christian and Latin Christian churches hold elaborate celebrations. One of the most striking ceremonies is celebrated by the Greek church in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and is locally called "Miracle of the Holy Fire." The enthusiasm is so great that at several celebrations hundreds of worshippers have been crushed to death.

The essential features of the ceremony are the reception and dissemination of the "holy fire." The fire is kindled in the holy sepulcher, and passed out through an opening made for the purpose in the side of the holy tomb. It is then made use of to light candles with which every worshiper is equipped. The intention is to symbolize the descent of the Holy Spirit. The candles are kept as sacred relics and are relighted only at marriages, births and deaths.

The reception of the fire is the work of the patriarch. He appears at the head of a gorgeous procession of ecclesiastics—bishops, archbishops and priests. He leads his followers three times around the holy tomb and enters when passing the doorway the third time, leaving his followers standing by. Shortly after the "holy fire" appears through the opening in the form of a blazing torch. Men have been appointed to snatch the torch. These light their own candles and pass it on to their neighbors; every burning candle becomes a train leading on the sacred fire to a hundred others. Robert Hichens' description of the scene is in part this:

"It came at last. With a fierce gesture as of savage exultation the long-haired priest withdrew his arm from the hole and held up a great bunch of flaming candles. And then delirium seized the close-packed thousands. All the mouths opened to let out yells, shrieks and the wild titterings of women. All the arms gesticulated with frenzy toward the smoky yellow flames. All the bodies struggled desperately, cruelly to get to them. And the priest dipped his torch, and suddenly fire began to rush through the great church. The patriarch tore out of the holy sepulcher and fell in the Greek cathedral with the fire in his hands. From the balconies near the blue star-spangled dome masses of candles were let down by long cords, were lighted by priests below and were drawn up flaming. Fire encircled the rotunda, three tiers of fire. . . . Through the glare, the smoke, the roaring, the procession . . . bishops and priests, accompanied by soldiers, by acolytes, by banner bearers, by canopies beating the floor with their staves. . . . Down the avenue of banners and muskets and torches came bearded and long-haired men in magnificent vestments. . . . and the gorgeous Armenians, almost like moving idols, clad in the jewels of their wonderful treasury; and the withered-looking Copts and the astounding Abyssinians, in magenta, with partly shaved heads and great tufts of coarse hair, like the gaudy puppets that people a nightmare."

From time immemorial the Christians of Jerusalem have observed the events of Christ's passion, death and resurrection in complete and dramatic fashion, and it was from Jerusalem that Easter customs spread to other parts of the world. The earliest record of these observances is in 385. At that time the Christians strove to realize by appropriate ceremony and ritual the events of the last acts in the life of Jesus. Each event was commemorated, as far as possible, on the spot of its occurrence. The proper passages from the Gospel were read and appropriate prayers were said as the clergy and people went in procession from place to place—Bethany, Gethsemane, Golgotha, the sepulcher and Olivet. It was during the middle ages that the character of the ceremonies changed greatly, taking on spectacular features, which have persisted to the present day.

Tradition with more or less accuracy has fixed the course of the Via Dolorosa and the 14 stations at which the chief events on the way to the cross occurred. It is followed by thousands of visitors on Easter week. Easter is the principal festival of the Christian

year for the reason that it commemorates the resurrection of Jesus. In the words of Paul, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain." "But," he says, "now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that sleep." Which is to say that the Christian religion stands on the resurrection of Jesus.

Pagan Rites Survive.

But the Easter season is observed by millions who are not even nominally Christians. They do not celebrate the resurrection of Christ, but rather the end of winter, the approach of spring, the beginning of life in nature after the long sleep of winter. Celebrations of this kind antedate recorded history. When Christianity came into the world the Christian church adopted and modified such of these pagan rites of celebration as it could not abolish. This accounts for the many queer rites of the Christian observance of Easter in various parts of the world. They are pagan rites that had their origin in the remotest past, and have been modified by time and custom and a changed meaning.

Thus the parade of fashion to Easter morning church services in the large American cities had its origin ages ago in the superstition that failure to wear at least one new piece of clothing would bring bad luck during the year. The use of the egg as a symbol of new life is far older than Christianity. The Easter rabbit is a survival of an old, old superstition. The use of flowers as an expression of rejoicing is probably almost as old as man himself. The paschal candles are in another form the bonfires lighted by our remote ancestors to celebrate the arrival of spring.

Just how the rabbits managed to get into the Easter celebration nobody seems to be able to find out with any certainty. Anyway, they are not properly rabbits; they are hares. Undoubtedly the association of the hare with Easter and its eggs was introduced here by the Germans, but where they got the idea is what none of the antiquarians have been able to learn to their satisfaction. As far as they have gone they figure this way: The relation between the moon and the hare is fairly close. The relation of the moon to Easter is very close. Gradually in ancient times the hare seems to have become associated with Easter and with Easter eggs.

Easter and the Egg.

Easter without eggs—fresh laid, dyed and sugar—would be like Christmas without Santa Claus, the stocking and the tree. And the association of the egg with Easter is easily explained. Many of the old peoples of earth have used the egg from time immemorial as the symbol of the germ of life. The wise men of old taught that the world was hatched from an egg. All over the pagan world it signified fertility and potential life. The place of the egg was therefore firmly fixed in the spring celebrations that long antedated Christ and the Christian Easter. The Christian church found the egg so firmly established as an Easter symbol that it could not be dislodged. Therefore the church adopted the egg and adopted it as a symbol of the resurrection. In the transition of Easter from a heathen to a Christian festival the notion of the egg stands unbroken. When the coloring of eggs began, to the Christian the white stood for the immaculate conception; the red for the blood of the redemption, and the yellow for the dawn of the resurrection morn.

It is natural that many queer relics of ancient egg customs should have survived, while many have died on the way. For instance, the rulers of earth no longer indulge in Easter eggs wholesale. After the Easter celebration found its way into France every hen roost in the country was searched for the largest eggs, which were taken as a tribute to the king. And after the Easter high mass in the chapel of the Louvre there were brought into the royal cabinet pyramids of gilded eggs decked with verdure. The chaplain, after blessing them, distributed them among the persons of the court in the presence of his most Christian majesty.

In the time of Henry I, eggs were in great demand on Easter morn. In the tower is an old royal roll with an account of entry, "18d for 400 eggs to be used for ornamental purposes for Easter."

That the whole world associates the egg with Easter is shown by the fact that the Christian children in Mesopotamia play the same game at Easter of "picking" eggs that American boys do. In England in many places the boys and girls "roll" their colored eggs, just as the Washington children do on the White House grounds. This White House egg-rolling, by the way, is quite a celebration and as a curious spectacle is worth seeing.

There are many curious customs that obtain at Easter that have nothing to do with the day.

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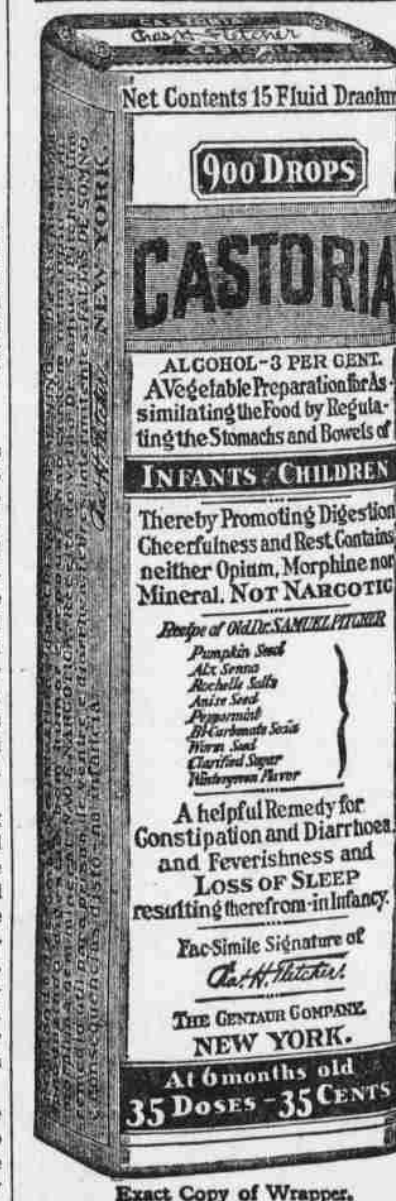
"I was troubled with spells of gasping for breath and had such dizzy attacks I often fell right over. Spots floated before my eyes and I got so nervous I couldn't stand any noise. I cried over nothing at all, became irritable and imagined all sorts of things. My health was shattered and I became discouraged."

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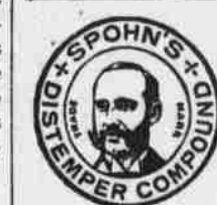
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Beecher's Prophecy About Brooklyn.

In 1858, in one of his sermons, Mr. Beecher is reported to have said: "It will not be many years before Brooklyn will contain as many inhabitants as the whole continent did at the time of the Revolution. I believe Brooklyn is destined to have a population of two or three million souls." Brooklyn now has 2,000,000 inhabitants, and it is leading the five boroughs in the number of registered voters.

Silence may be golden, but it won't pay the expense of the drummer.

A man who is not spoken of is not abused.

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